
Imperial Eyes

Travel Writing and Transculturation

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the quincennial underscores what tremendous historical force has been wielded by the European ideologies of territory and global possessiveness that are the critical focus of this book.

This is also a book by an Anglo-Canadian expatriate for whom the openings of the 1960s and 1970s coalesced in an attempt to sustain teaching, maternity, writing, parenting, institution-building, and domestic partnership in the United States. Many of the people to whom I owe my sanity, well-being, and such wisdom as has come to me in these years are people without whom this book would probably have been finished a lot sooner (to little advantage): graduate students in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and the Program in Modern Thought and Literature at Stanford; colleagues in the Seminar on Women and Culture in Latin America and the Cultural Studies Research Group; my beloved and unsynthesizable children Sam, Manuel, and Olivia; my partner and most precious interlocutor, Renato Rosaldo. To Jean Franco, Kathleen Newman, Ed Cohen, Rina Benmayor, Nancy Donham, and Jim Clifford, I am thankful for conversation and comments on parts of this work, but above all for their abiding friendship. I am grateful to Harriet Ritvo and Vince Raphael for generously reading chapters and for many helpful comments. As research and editorial assistants, Judith Raiskin, Elizabeth Cook, and Dane Johnson worked harder and more imaginatively than I had any right to expect. I have appreciated their help.

While none of what follows has been presented previously in the form it has here, earlier versions of some sections have appeared in articles in *College Literature*, 8, 1981; *Escritura*, 7, 1979; *Georgetown University Roundtable in Language and Linguistics*, 1982; *Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1985; *Nuevo Texto Critico*, 1, 1987; *Inscriptions*, 1, 1987; and essays in the collections *Writing Culture* (ed. James Clifford and George Marcus, Berkeley, California UP, 1986), *"Race," Writing and Difference* (ed. Henry Louis Gates, Chicago, Chicago UP, 1986) and *Literature and Anthropology* (eds Jonathan Hall and Ackbar Abbas, Hong Kong, Hong Kong UP, 1986).

Chapter 1

Introduction: Criticism in the contact zone

In Listowel, Ontario, the small Canadian farm town where I grew up, one corner of the main intersection was occupied by Livingstone's Drugstore, run by Dr. Livingstone. Dr. Livingstone was a real doctor turned druggist, but for children his store was above all the place where you could buy practical jokes, or have them played on you by Dr. Livingstone, especially if you went in on an afternoon when Mrs. Livingstone wasn't there. It was through Dr. Livingstone, for example, that I was introduced to the miracles of the dribble glass, the squirt ring, the Chinese handcuff, the phony pack of Juicy Fruit Gum that snapped down on your finger, and, around 1955, a horrifying new item Dr. Livingstone secretly sold my older brother and his friend: plastic vomit. I was therefore unsure if he really meant it the day he produced a discolored sheet of faded writing in a frame and said it was a letter written by a great uncle of his who had been a famous missionary in Africa. Only after consulting at Sunday school with Miss Roxie Ellis, herself a former missionary, did I take the story for true. "Our" Dr. Livingstone was a grand nephew of the "real" Dr. Livingstone in Africa. English Canada was still colonial in the 1950s: reality and history were somewhere else, embodied in British men.

The name on the faded letter followed me, trailing its colonial legacy. When they put in sewers in Listowel they decided to change all the street names, and ours was upgraded from Raglan Street to Livingstone Avenue. The town itself had been named a century before by the postmaster, in true colonial fashion, after his wife's birthplace in Listowel, Ireland. My sister met up with that piece of history in the mid-1970s in East Africa. In the lobby of the Nairobi YWCA she met Dame Judith Listowel, a wiry, penniless, and eccentric adventuress in her seventies, who was disgusted at the cost of hotels, and mildly interested to hear about the town that bore her name in Canada. A few years after that, when I was researching this book in California, I came across a book by Dame Judith which she must have just finished writing when my sister met her – it was a biography of David Livingstone. I don't know where Dame Judith is now, but my mother, who still lives in Listowel, recently moved into the former Livingstone mansion,

now converted to a retirement home. "English-speaking peoples of the world, unite!" All his life my father held passionately to that nostalgic, neoimperial call. Even after they changed his street name and my sister came back with her story from Nairobi, he never conceded that they already were united, or at least stuck together, all across the globe, with words.

Redundancy, discontinuity, and unreality. These are some of the chief coordinates of the text of Euroimperialism, the stuff of its power to constitute the everyday with neutrality, spontaneity, numbing repetition (Livingstone, Livingstone . . .). In recent years that power has become open to question and subject to scrutiny in the academy, as part of a large-scale effort to decolonize knowledge. This book is part of that effort. The effort must be, among other things, an exercise in humility. For one of the things it brings most forcefully into play are contestatory expressions from the site of imperial intervention, long ignored in the metropolis; the critique of empire coded ongoingly on the spot, in ceremony, dance, parody, philosophy, counterknowledge and counterhistory, in texts unwitnessed, suppressed, lost, or simply overlain with repetition and unreality. It calls for the story of another letter.

In 1908 a Peruvianist named Richard Pietschmann was exploring in the Danish Royal Archives in Copenhagen when he came across a manuscript he had never seen before. It was dated in Cuzco in the year 1613, some four decades after the final fall of the Inca Empire to the Spanish, and signed with an unmistakably Amerindian, Andean name: Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala. (*Guaman* in Quechua means "falcon" and *poma* means "leopard.") Written in a mixture of Quechua and rough, ungrammatical Spanish, the manuscript was a letter addressed by this unknown Andean to King Philip III of Spain. What stunned Pietschmann was that the letter was twelve hundred pages long. There were nearly eight hundred pages of written text and four hundred elaborate line drawings with explanatory captions. Titled the *New Chronicle and Good Government and Justice*, the manuscript proposed nothing less than a new view of the world. It began by rewriting the history of Christendom to include the indigenous peoples of America, then went on to describe in great detail the history and lifeways of the Andean peoples and their leaders. This was followed by a revisionist account of the Spanish conquest, and hundreds of pages documenting and denouncing Spanish exploitation and abuse. The four hundred illustrations followed the European genre of the captioned line drawing but, as subsequent research revealed, they deployed specifically Andean structures of spatial symbolism (see plates 1 and 3.) Guaman Poma's letter ends with a mock interview in which he advises the King as to his responsibilities, and proposes a new form of government through collaboration of Andean and Spanish elites.

No one knew (or knows) how this extraordinary work got to the library in Copenhagen, or how long it had been there. No one, it appeared, had ever bothered to read it, or even figured out how to read it. Quechua was

EL PRIMER MUNDO ADAM EVA



1 Guaman Poma de Ayala's drawing of biblical creation. The caption reads "El primer mundo/Adam, Eva," "The first world/Adam, Eve." The drawing is organized according to Andean symbolic space, with Adam and the rooster on the "male" side of the picture under the male symbol of the sun and Eve, the chickens and children on the female side, marked by the moon. The two spheres are divided by a diagonal, here marked by Adam's digging stick, a basic tool of Andean agriculture. The Inca empire was likewise laid out in four kingdoms divided by two diagonals intersecting at the city of Cuzco.

not known as a written language in 1908, or Andean culture as a literate culture. Pietschmann prepared a paper on his find which he presented in London in 1912. The reception of his paper, by an international congress of Americanists, was apparently confused. It took another twenty-five years for a facsimile edition of Guaman Poma's work to appear in Paris; the few scholars who worked on it did so in isolation. It was not until the late 1970s, as positivist reading habits gave way to interpretive studies and Eurocentric elitisms gave way to postcolonial pluralisms, that Guaman Poma's text began to be read as the extraordinary intercultural *tour de force* that it was.²

To be read, *and to be readable*. The readability of Guaman Poma's letter today is another sign of the changing intellectual dynamics through which colonial meaning-making has become a subject of critical investigation. His elaborate inter-cultural text and its tragic history exemplify the possibilities and perils of writing in what I like to call "contact zones," social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.

Perhaps these two letters – the seemingly inevitable monolingual page from an Englishman in Africa to his nephew, yellowing on the wall of a rural Canadian drugstore, and the seemingly incredible twelve hundred bilingual pages from an unknown Andean to the King of Spain, lost in an archive in Copenhagen – can serve to suggest the vast, discontinuous, and overdetermined history of imperial meaning-making that is the context for this book. Its main, but not its only subject is European travel and exploration writing, analysed in connection with European economic and political expansion since around 1750. The book aims to be both a study in genre and a critique of ideology. Its predominant theme is how travel books by Europeans about non-European parts of the world went (and go) about creating the "domestic subject"³ of Euroimperialism; how they have engaged metropolitan reading publics with (or to) expansionist enterprises whose material benefits accrued mainly to the very few. Several chapters of the book take up such questions through readings of particular corpuses of travel accounts connected with particular historical transitions. One chapter, for example, looks at eighteenth-century European writings on southern Africa in the context of inland expansion and the rise of natural history. Others study the emergence of sentimental travel writing through materials from the Caribbean and the early British exploration of West Africa (1780–1840). Others examine discursive reinventions of South America during the period of Spanish American independence (1800–40). Another traces continuities and mutations in the imperial imaginary from the Victorians in Central Africa (1860–1900) to postcolonial travelers of the 1960s and 1980s.

These case studies are shaped by a number of shared questions. How has travel and exploration writing *produced* "the rest of the world" for European readerships at particular points in Europe's expansionist trajectory? How has it produced Europe's differentiated conceptions of itself in relation to something it became possible to call "the rest of the world"? How do such signifying practices encode and legitimate the aspirations of economic expansion and empire? How do they betray them?

The book also undertakes to suggest connections from travel writing to forms of knowledge and expression that interact or intersect with it, outside and inside Europe. Chapter 2, for example, considers how travel writing and enlightenment natural history catalyzed each other to produce a Eurocentered form of global or, as I call it, "planetary" consciousness. The classificatory schemes of natural history are seen in relation to the vernacular peasant knowledges they sought to displace. Scientific and sentimental travel writing (chapters 3 through 5) are discussed in complementary fashion, as bourgeois forms of authority that displace older traditions of survival literature. Within the sentimental mode, relations are drawn between travel narrative and slave autobiography, which appear at about the same time and act upon each other. Chapter 7 emphasizes determinations of gender in some early nineteenth-century travel writing, focusing on a rather unpredictable division of labor between female and male writers. In chapter 9 the writings of what Teddy Roosevelt called "hyphenated Americans" are examined in terms of challenges they posed to the British explorer tradition; postcolonial travel writing of the 1960s is read in relation to tourist propaganda on the one hand and contestatory genres like *testimonio* and oral history on the other. Here too the enactment of race and gender relations is at issue.

At a number of points the book leaves both Europe and travel literature behind, to examine instances of non-European expression developed in interaction with European repertoires. Here the materials are from South America. Chapter 8 looks at how Spanish American writers in the early nineteenth century selected and adapted European discourses on America to their own task of creating autonomous decolonized cultures while retaining European values and white supremacy. It is a study in the dynamics of creole self-fashioning. Elsewhere, instances from the history of Andean indigenous expression (like Guaman Poma's letter) are introduced to suggest the dynamics of self-representation in the context of colonial subordination and resistance. While the representational practices of Europeans remain the chief subject of the book, then, I have sought ways to mitigate a reductive, diffusionist perspective.

I have also sought ways to interrupt the totalizing momentum of both the study of genre and the critique of ideology. These projects are both anchored, as I am, in the metropolis; to concede them autonomy or completeness would reaffirm metropolitan authority in its own terms – the very thing travel writers are often charged to do. In writing this book I have tried

to avoid simply reproducing the dynamics of possession and innocence whose workings I analyze in texts. The term "transculturation" in the title sums up my efforts in this direction. Ethnographers have used this term to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.⁴ While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone. In the context of this book, the concept serves to raise several sets of questions. How are metropolitan modes of representation received and appropriated on the periphery? That question engenders another perhaps more heretical one: with respect to representation, how does one speak of transculturation from the colonies to the metropolis? The fruits of empire, we know, were pervasive in shaping European domestic society, culture, and history. How have Europe's constructions of subordinated others been shaped by those others, by the constructions of themselves and their habitats that they presented to the Europeans? Borders and all, the entity called Europe was constructed from the outside in as much as from the inside out. Can this be said of its modes of representation? While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery (in the emanating glow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of development, for example), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis – beginning, perhaps, with the latter's obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself. Travel writing, among other institutions, is heavily organized in the service of that imperative. So, one might add, is much of European literary history.

In the attempt to suggest a dialectic and historicized approach to travel writing, I have manufactured some terms and concepts along the way. One coinage that recurs throughout the book is the term "contact zone," which I use to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict. I borrow the term "contact" here from its use in linguistics, where the term contact language refers to improvised languages that develop among speakers of different native languages who need to communicate with each other consistently, usually in context of trade. Such languages begin as pidgins, and are called creoles when they come to have native speakers of their own. Like the societies of the contact zone, such languages are commonly regarded as chaotic, barbarous, lacking in structure. (Ron Carter has suggested the term "contact literatures" to refer to literatures written in European languages from outside Europe.⁵) "Contact zone" in my discussion is often synonymous with "colonial frontier." But while the latter term is grounded within a

European expansionist perspective (the frontier is a frontier only with respect to Europe), "contact zone" is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect. By using the term "contact," I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination. A "contact" perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and "travelees," not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.⁶

A second term I use often in what follows is "anti-conquest," by which I refer to the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony. The term "anti-conquest" was chosen because, as I argue, in travel and exploration writings these strategies of innocence are constituted in relation to older imperial rhetorics of conquest associated with the absolutist era. The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call the "seeing-man," an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse – he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess.

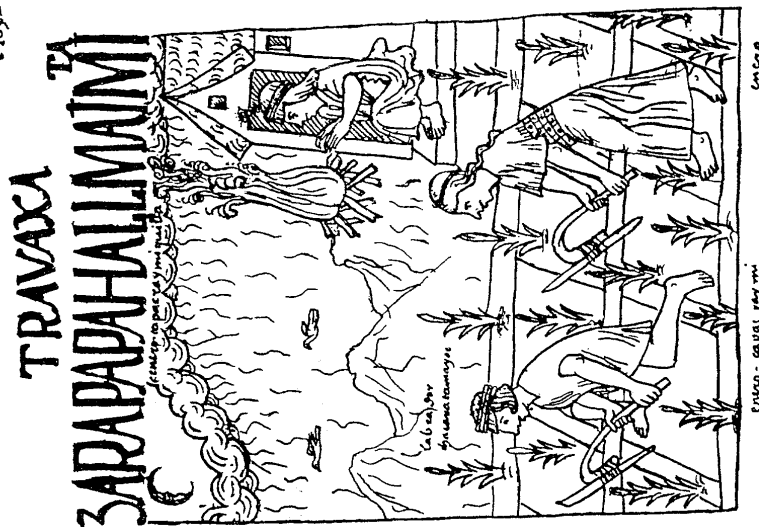
A third and final idiosyncratic term that appears in what follows is "autoethnography" or "autoethnographic expression." I use these terms to refer to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms. If ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations. Guaman Poma's review of Inca history and customs in his *New Chronicle*, and his appropriation of the Spanish chronicle form to do so, constitute a canonical instance of autoethnographic representation (see plates 2 and 3). Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as "authentic" or autochthonous forms of self-representation (such as the Andean *quipus*, which stored much of the information Guaman Poma wrote down). Rather autoethnography involves partial collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror. Often, as in the case of Guaman Poma, the idioms appropriated and transformed are those of travel and exploration writing, merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous modes. Often, as with Guaman Poma's letter, they are bilingual and dialogic. Autoethnographic texts are typically heterogeneous on the reception end as well, usually addressed both to metropolitan readers and to literate sectors of the speaker's own social group, and bound to be received very differently by each. Often such texts constitute a group's point of entry

into metropolitan literate culture. Though I have been unable to pursue the matter here, I believe that autoethnographic expression is a very widespread phenomenon of the contact zone, and will become important in unraveling the histories of imperial subjugation and resistance as seen from the site of their occurrence.

The outlines of this study are intentionally broad, but they open out from a point of departure that is quite specific. It is marked in the mid-eighteenth century, by two simultaneous and, as I argue, intersecting processes in Northern Europe: the emergence of natural history as a structure of knowledge, and the momentum toward interior, as opposed to maritime, exploration. These developments, as I suggest in the following chapter, register a shift in what can be called European "planetary consciousness," a shift that coincides with many others including the consolidation of bourgeois forms of subjectivity and power, the inauguration of a new territorial phase of capitalism propelled by searches for raw materials, the attempt to extend coastal trade inland, and national imperatives to seize overseas territory in order to prevent its being seized by rival European powers. From this point of departure, the book moves in a roughly chronological order.

The geographical parameters I have chosen are historically determined as well. At the end of the eighteenth century, South America and Africa,

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2 Autoethnographic depiction from Guaman Poma's *Nueva coronica y buen gobierno*, from a series of representations of Andean agriculture. Caption reads "Trabaxa/Zara, papa hallmai mita" meaning "Work [in Spanish]/corn, time of rain and banking up [in Quechua]." The small writing under the caption reads "enero/Capac Raymi Quilla" meaning "January [in Spanish]/month of great feasting [in Quechua]. The man on the left is identified as a "labrador, chacarc camahoc," "laborer [in Spanish], in charge of sowing [in Quechua]."



3 Contemporary autoethnographic representation, by painters from the Andean town of Sarhua, State of Ayacucho, Peru. The caption, "Sarhu" means "sowing" in Quechua. These paintings, a unique creation of the artists of Sarhua, often include much longer captions explaining in Spanish the custom named in Quechua.

long linked with Europe and each other by trade, became parallel sites of new European expansionist initiatives arising precisely from the new momentum for interior exploration. The "opening up" of Africa began haltingly in the 1780s with the founding of the African Association (see chapter 4). Simultaneously in Spanish America, independence movements that would open the South American continent to the same expansionist energies were beginning to consolidate themselves, also haltingly (Francisco Miranda first sought revolutionary support from England in the 1780s). Much of the momentum on both continents was British, as are many of the writers I discuss here. In 1806 Britain invaded both the Rio de la Plata and the Cape of Good Hope – using some of the same officers in both places. But the players were by no means entirely British. In 1799, the German Alexander von Humboldt and the Frenchman Aimé Bonpland were preparing to join a trip up the Nile, when they were thwarted by Napoleon's invasion of North Africa. They transposed their itinerary to South America and went up the Orinoco instead (see chapter 6). In the 1860s and 1700s, decolonization movements in Africa and national liberation movements in the Americas shared ideals, practices, and intellectual leadership. In the same period, not coincidentally, both continents became the object of the grumpy metropolitan discourse I discuss in chapter 9 as the "third-world blues."

Readers of European travel books about Europe have pointed out that many of the conventions and writing strategies I associate here with imperial expansionism characterize travel writing about Europe as well. As I suggest at several points in the discussion, when that is so, related dynamics of power and appropriation are likely to be found at work as well. The discourses that legitimate bourgeois authority and delegitimize peasant and subsistence lifeways, for example, can be expected to do this ideological work within Europe as well as in southern Africa or Argentina. The forms of social critique through which European women claim political voice at home make similar, though not identical, claims abroad. The eighteenth century has been identified as a period in which Northern Europe asserted itself as the center of civilization, claiming the legacy of the Mediterranean as its own.⁸ It is not surprising, then, to find German or British accounts of Italy sounding like German or British accounts of Brazil.

I described this book earlier as a study in genre as well as a critique of ideology. Scholarship on travel and exploration literature, such as it exists, has tended to develop along neither of these lines. Often it is celebratory, recapitulating the exploits of intrepid eccentrics or dedicated scientists. In other instances it is documentary, drawing on travel accounts as sources of information about the places, peoples, and times they discuss. More recently, an aestheticist or literary vein of scholarship has developed, in which travel accounts, usually by famous literary figures, are studied in the artistic and intellectual dimensions and with reference to European existential dilemmas. I am doing none of these things. With respect to genre, I have attempted here

to pay serious attention to the conventions of representation that constitute European travel writing, identifying different strands, suggesting ways of reading and focuses for rhetorical analysis. The book includes many readings of quoted passages. I hope that some of the readings and ways of reading I propose will be suggestive for people thinking about similar materials from other times and places. The study of tropes often serves to unify corpuses and define genres in terms, for example, of shared repertoires of devices and conventions (and yet it is, of course, the corpuses that create the repertoires). My aim here, however, is not to define or codify. I have sought to use the study of tropes as much to disunify as to unify what one might call a rhetoric of travel writing. I have aimed not to circumscribe travel writing as a genre but to suggest its heterogeneity and its interactions with other kinds of expression.